

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

EXHORTATION—"SET YOUR HEART."

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

"Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God."—1 Chronicles xxii. 19.

THIS exhortation may be most fitly directed *to those who are already saved*. It was first given to the elders of Israel, and we would fain hope that they were already good men and true; but, secondly, the language might be very fitly addressed *to the unconverted*. There may be a little straining in this latter case; for we can hardly call the Lord *their* God as yet, but still we shall venture to say to the unconverted who have come up with God's people, "Set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God."

I. Let us take it, first, in ITS REFERENCE TO GOD'S OWN PEOPLE. You have already found the Lord. There is a sense in which you have not to seek him, for you already know him: but in another sense you are still to seek him, for seeking the Lord is a description of the whole of the believer's life. After he has found God as his salvation, he has to seek him as his Friend, as his Sanctifier, as his Example. Until they come to that glorious perfection which belongs to the better world, Christian men have something still to seek.

Our first enquiry is, "*What are they to seek?*" Beloved friends, I say to you, as David said to the princes of Israel, "Seek the Lord your God." *Do it by endeavouring to obey him in everything*. Let it be our study to test everything that we do by God's Holy Word. Let us not wilfully sin, either in commission or in omission. Let us be very particular to seek out the will of the Lord, so as to fulfil not only commands which are plain, but those about which there is a question. In the service of God nothing is little; and loyalty to the great royalty of God comes out in tenderness of conscience concerning little things. He that carelessly offends in trifles shall fall by little and little. The greatest catastrophes in moral life come not usually upon a sudden, but by slow degrees. The dry rot enters the under timbers of the house of human character, and when it has silently worked its mischief, the house falls with a shock. It is not the wind of temptation that brings it down: that may be the apparent instrument; but the sly,

secret rot, that has all the while been going on, is the real destroyer. Therefore let us pledge ourselves unto God to live more and more watchfully, seeking the Lord with our heart and soul in everything—in private, in the family, in business, and in the house of God. He that walks hastily without consideration will assuredly err ; but he that takes counsel of God, and watches to know what the will of the Master may be, shall walk uprightly and surely. O Christian, set your heart to this, that the Lord Jesus is your absolute Lord and Master ; and that, at every point, you will scrupulously endeavour to do his will, yielding a cheerful obedience as the fruit of the Spirit within your soul !

Seek the Lord also especially, as David wanted these princes to do, in *the building up of his temple*. He says, "Set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God. Arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the Lord." Beloved, it ought to be the main business of the life of every Christian to build up the church. It ought to be mine, and I trust that it is. I know that this is the main business of many of my brethren and sisters here, since for its sake they forego many an hour of leisure, and to it they give the best of their faculties. We are sent here on purpose to build the city of God, which is his church. The foundations thereof have been laid in the fair vermilion of our Saviour's precious blood. Stone upon stone the walls have risen. It is ours to help onward the building, in quarry or in forest, with saw or with axe. If we cannot do great works, we must weave the hangings, or fashion the pins, or twist the cords. It should be the main object of our life to seek the Lord by building up his church. Oh, how I wish that all Christians thought so ! Alas, many fancy that the work of the church is to be left to a dozen or two of us—that the minister is to do his best with a few friends, but the bulk of the people are to be excused the glorious liberty of the service of the blessed God. Come, my brethren, one and all, seek the Lord with all your heart and soul in the building up of his church. Let nothing be lacking to the church of God in the Tabernacle, which is as a city set upon a hill.

Let all you do, whether it be of personal obedience or in connection with the church, be done with a single eye to God's glory. O Christian men and women, what have you to do with worldly honour ? What have you to do with ease ? The target towards which your life's arrow should speed is the glory of him who made you, who hath redeemed you with his precious blood, and hath created you a second time, that you may be for him, and for him alone. Know ye not that the Lord's portion is his people ? Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. How heartily we ought to respond to the Lord's choice of us by glorying that we are Christ's chosen servants, and that now the one thing for which we live is to reflect the glory of his blessed name ! To this are ye called, O ye elect and redeemed of the Most High ! This is your high destiny. Answer to it on earth, as you hope to fulfil it in heaven. Seek ye the Lord. That is what is intended in the text—to render obedience, and to labour for the building of his temple, and the honour of his name.

Next, let us enquire, *how are they to seek ?* Here is the text : "Set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God." Does not that intend a fixity of purpose ? "*Set your heart and your soul.*" There

are plenty of flimsy creatures about—whose manhood has long ago evaporated, who are "everything by turns and nothing long." These fritter away life; like fluttering butterflies of the garden, they stay not long enough in any place to gather sweetness even from the choicest flowers. The genuine man of God, who is going to serve the Lord, puts his foot down; and you might as well hope to pluck up the North Pole as to move him from his chosen sphere. He has looked ahead, and he sees on what tack he ought to steer, and he will hold the tiller to that point; over mountain waves, or through the trough of the billows, he still will speed his way; he has looked to his chart, and settled his course, and he is not to be turned aside. Ye who are men must now serve your God with a determination that cannot be shaken. Resolve that you will glorify God by holding fast his truth, and by following in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus; for the times are flippant, and only the resolute can master them.

You see that David says, "Set your heart"; that is, have an intense affection towards God's service and glory. A man never does a thing well if his heart is not in it. No painter has attained to excellence unless he has mixed his colours, not only with his brains, but with the life-blood of his heart. Success comes not to heartless efforts. Certainly it is so in the service of the living God. He will not accept a sacrifice which lacks the life-blood of a warm, affectionate intent. Brethren, nobody is good by accident. No man ever became holy by chance. There must be a resolve, a desire, a panting, a pining after obedience to God, or else we shall never have it. Set your heart, then, to seek the Lord your God.

There are other parts of your nature besides your heart. Your soul has in it, among other things, an intellect. I would that all who serve God would serve him with their intellect, for many seem to jog on in the service of God like old horses that have gone their round so often that they now crawl over the road in their sleep. Alas, the first big stone in the road throws them over! Let us resolve neither to leave our heads nor our hearts at home when we come into God's house. The whole man should be present, and energetic, when God is to be honoured. We ought to plot and plan how to win a soul as earnestly as we contrive to make a profit in our trade. We ought as much to speculate and scheme to glorify God as we meditate how to advance our business. Our inventive genius should be more concerned to set jewels in the Redeemer's crown than to perfect the most beautiful work of art. Let our motto be,—*"All for Jesus"*; for he has redeemed us altogether. Every thought of throbbing brain, every affection of beating heart, every movement of cunning hand, all should be for him at its best, and kept well at work for his royal service. The yoke of Christ should be laid not merely on the shoulder, but on every part, and power, and passion of our entire manhood. So should it be. God grant it may be so!

And then if I am again asked the question, "How ought we to seek the Lord?" I answer,—by the union and concentration of all our faculties. Our life should be comparable to sunlight; and holy zeal, like a burning-glass, should focus it upon a given spot, and cause it to burn its way to success. He will never do much for God who attempts to serve a dozen masters. I have been called upon this week

by several persons to give my aid in trifling matters of politics, finance, and social arrangement. "Why," I said to the applicants, "there are hundreds of people who can attend to these matters quite as well as I can." "Yes, sir, but we want your weight and influence." I replied, "My weight and influence belong to Another. I am very willing to help you in any good thing if I can do it without diverting my attention from the service of my Master; but my time is not my own. I have to preach the gospel; you can get any blind fiddler to canvass for your candidate. I must attend to my Master's business, and let the dead bury their dead." I would have you Christian people, while you attend to everything that is just, and right, and kind, and proper, and of good repute—everything that can benefit your fellow-men, or help the cause of liberty and righteousness; yet, still, keep your souls undivided and entire for the service of your God. Throw your life into your religion. Do not be like the man, whose child at Sunday-school was asked, "Is your father a religious man?" "Yes, sir," she said, "father has religion; but he has not done much at it lately." I am afraid there are many of that sort. They have not taken their coats off at it; they have not thrown their whole souls into it. Brethren, if you follow Christ, follow him fully. If you mean to be Christians, *be* Christians. If you are worldlings, give your hearts to the world, or you will make nothing of it: it would be a pity to halt between two objects so as to miss both. If Jehovah be God, serve him with your *heart*, with the concentrated energy of your entire nature at its best. See, Christian people, to what you are called.

But the text also tells us *when we are to seek the Lord*. It has a little word in it—a golden monosyllable it is. It is a word which comprehends the whole almanack, every day in the week, all the year round. "*Now* set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God." Now is the only time worth having, because indeed it is the only time we ever have. While I speak it is gone, and another "*now*" has come up. Take your moments on the wing, and use them as they fly. Now, now, now, let us give ourselves, heart and soul, to the service of the Lord our God.

When did David mean by his "*now*"? I think he meant, first, when the people had an efficient leader. "I am dying," said he, "but there is Solomon, my son. He is a man of peace, and God has said that he shall build his temple; therefore arise, and seek the Lord." It is a grand thing for any church when God sends them one who can lead them, about whom they are united in judgment, and with whom they can hopefully march to the conflict. Alas! I know several churches that have been sadly troubled by the deaths of faithful ministers. I pray you, if you are members of a church which has a God-sent minister still alive, and at its head, *now* set your heart and your soul to serve God. While he spares his servant to lead you on to success, take care that you follow with holy enthusiasm. "*Now*" is the time for activity.

He means also, when God is with you. Read the eighteenth verse, "Is not the Lord your God with you?" When God is with you, get to work. What can you do if God be gone? And how soon you will drive him away unless you work while you are in his company! God never came upon earth to live among sluggards, and to have communion

with drones. Two cannot walk together unless they be agreed, and one thing they must assuredly be agreed on, and that is the rate at which they mean to walk; they cannot walk together except at the same pace. Jesus Christ never travels slowly. It is quick marching with him. Ho, ye laggards, quicken your steps, or he will leave you far behind! Serve the Lord with greater diligence, or you will lose delight in his ways. While God is with you, O gracious men, set your hearts and your souls to seek him!

Note again, that he says, "Hath he not given you rest on every side?" That is another set time when we ought to serve the Lord with all our might. When we have rest from care, then our care should be to please the Lord. You, my brother, are released from all that affliction which wearied you a few weeks ago; therefore praise the Lord. Your enemies are quiet, your anxieties do not harass you as they used to do; therefore extol your God. Serve God with all your might when he deals out his favour to you. When there has been dull weather and no wind, how eagerly the mariner hails the first breath of air! If there is but a capful of wind, he labours to make headway with it. He uses every movement that would flutter a handkerchief. So it ought to be with God's people; they should turn the least favour to advantage, and much more the greater. When God gives us rest, and joy, and peace, let us make a Sabbath of it, and consecrate the gladsome hours to his highest glory.

But, indeed, this "now," as I have said, is of general acceptance. *Now*, you young men in the prime of your vigour, set your heart and your soul to the service of God. We want more men for our Evangelists' Association. We are very short of preachers—preachers to go to rooms, and mission-halls, and suburban villages, to declare Christ to the people. *Now*, then, set your heart and soul to the service of God while you are young. Sunday-schools around us are pining for want of teachers. Young men and women, you are the people to undertake such service as this. Do not stand back. There is nothing like serving God in your youth. As soon as you are saved yourselves, seek to rescue others. The Christian man who does not give God the morning of his days is not very likely to give him much of the evening. He who does not rise with the lark is not likely to sing like him.

If I speak thus to the young, I would speak with equal force to the middle-aged. *Now*, my brethren and my sisters, we have had some experience: we are no longer children: we know a little of the good way, and some of that little was learned in a painful school. I have had my knuckles rapped very often to make me learn how to make simple up-strokes and down-strokes; and now I desire to fill my page with my Master's name. If we have learned anything, let us set our heart and our soul to serve the living God with all the wisdom and experience which grace has given us.

You, upon whose heads I see the snows of many a winter—you, whose bare heads show how often the rough winds of age have swept over your brows—surely with so short a time to live, it becomes you to set your heart and your soul to serve the Lord. If men knew how brief their time is, how much would they quicken their service, if they really loved Christ as he ought to be loved! At this hour this is my one message to old and young, to myself and to you: let us be up and doing.

Beloved brethren and sisters, you who have been with me these many years, and you who have lately come among us, let us begin again. Let us set our hearts and our souls with dogged determination to serve the Lord. If the work be difficult, a hard thing can always be cut with something harder. You can cut a diamond with a diamond. Oh, to have a divinely hardened resolution that will cut through anything for Christ! Comrades, we will win souls for Jesus, or we will break our hearts over it! God help us, for his name's sake!

II. Brethren in Christ, I have done with you now. You can sit still, and pray, while I talk to the others. I have now to SPEAK TO THOSE WHO ARE UNCONVERTED, just whispering to you, dear friends, that I should like to spread the big net, and take many in it; and they will be taken if the Holy Spirit be here in answer to your prayers.

To you who are unconverted, I would earnestly say, set your hearts on true religion, and be not content with the outward form of it. Observe that David had gathered these noblemen and gentlemen around his bed to urge them to build a temple; but he was a spiritual man, and he knew that temple-building was not everything, although he valued it highly. He knew that there was something better than outward service, and so he said to these men, "Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God." By all manner of means attend the house of God, though you are not a Christian: but do go with the desire that God will bless the word, and make you a Christian. While you diligently attend to the outward ordinances of God's house, I pray you do not trust in them, but seek the Lord your God himself. Baptism is the duty of every believer, but it is not the duty of anybody except a believer: I pray you do not put the sign in the place of the thing signified. Do not trust in baptism. Why, if you were not only immersed, but immersed in a thousand seas, this would not help you to salvation! You must be born again. You must seek the Lord. There is no salvation in an outward ceremony. If any of you come to the Lord's table, I pray you do not come with any view of getting grace by coming, or finding salvation in the eating of a morsel of bread, and the taking of a sip of wine. The elements upon the table cannot help you. The communion will be injurious to you, if you are not a true believer. Examine yourself whether you be in the faith, and so eat of that bread; but do not dare to eat of it unless in your very heart you have first known the Lord, and are feeding upon him. I put this to every person who is not yet converted. Do not rest in hymn-singing, church-going, chapel-going, bending your knee in private prayer, or in anything else that comes of yourself. Your salvation lies outside of yourself, in Christ Jesus. Fly away to Jesus! Tarry not in any outward signs or symbols. Build the temple by all means; but first of all set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord.

Now observe that the end which we would persuade you to, by God's good Spirit, is that you seek the Lord himself. Do not merely seek to know doctrine, or to learn precept. Seek the Lord. There is such a person as Jesus Christ the Lord. Seek *him*. The key-note of the gospel is from the lip of Jesus, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Seek not to your minister, your hymn-book, your prayer-book, or even to your Bible; but seek the Lord. Some think to find salvation in

the Bible, and fancy that Bible-reading is the way of salvation: but it is not. "Ye search the Scriptures," says Christ, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." If you put Bible-reading in the place of coming to Christ by faith, you will miss the mark. You must come to a personal Saviour in your own person, by putting your trust in him. Trust in Jesus; not in a doctrine, nor in a command, but *in him*; and then you will be saved. You must trust in him of the five wounds, in him of the bloody sweat, in him of the thorny crown, in him of the deadly cross. Trust in him at once. This alone is the way of salvation. "Set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord," for he says to you by my mouth, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and beside me there is none else."

But now observe—for I want to force this home, as God shall help me—that you must seek him at once with all your heart and soul. That is to say, I believe that when a man is awakened, the first thing he ought to do is to find assured salvation. I have heard of a man who went upstairs to seek the Lord, with the desperate resolve that he would do no business till he was right with God. He did not take down his shop-shutters, for he had resolved to find a Saviour before he took another penny across the counter. I cannot judge that man to have been unwise in the reckoning of God and the holy angels; for the first necessary of life is a renewed heart. If I thought that I was struck with a serious disease I would not wait until it grew incurable; but I would go to a physician, and have the matter attended to before it went further. Would not you? Act with the same speed as to your souls. Oh, men and women, there is but a step between you and hell, unless God's mercy shall interpose! How can you trifle! It is no trifling matter. A lost soul—what mourning can equal the sorrow of it? Hang the heavens in sackcloth; darken the sun; extinguish the moon. Silence all mirth! Hush all music! Ye harps of heaven, be still! Ye angels, cease your sonnets! The funeral of a lost soul is the most awful solemnity that can be conceived. Such a funeral may be needed for you within an hour. What did I say? There may not remain a minute. Your breath fails, and you are lost. Oh, sirs, I pray you make short work of your rebellious delays! Put everything aside, and seek the Lord with heart and soul.

And does not that mean that, if anything hinders your finding salvation, you must have done with it? Does certain company hinder your religious thought? Do not go into such society. Is an allowable pursuit detrimental to your finding Christ? Do not follow it. It might be death to you, though it is sport for others. You must have Christ: see that you do have him. That prayer of our hymn—

"Give me Christ, or else I die,"

ought to be in your heart and on your lips. Put everything else away until you get an answer to that petition. Follow after everything that may help you to find Christ. When I was seeking Christ, I was in the house of God whenever the doors were opened. I heard a preacher, who did not speak home to my heart, and therefore I went to hear

another. I did not care who the preacher was, or what he was, if I could but find Christ under him. Neither was I particular whether I stood or sat, or whether I had a soft cushion to sit on, or none at all. I wanted Christ, and I protest that if I had been forced to sit on the gallery-front, I would not have minded where I was so that I could have found the Saviour. Any hayloft would have done for me, if I could have found forgiveness. Prayer-meetings, little gatherings of godly people,—why I was sure to be at them if I knew of them, for I wanted to find the Saviour. You will have the Saviour when your whole heart and soul are after him. Remember, the Lord will not save you while you are dreaming or dancing. He took Eve out of the side of Adam when Adam slumbered, but he will not take sin out of you when you are asleep. You must be roused up in some way or other. You must be startled, if not with thunderbolts, yet with the sweet heart-searching love of Christ. You must be thoroughly awake, and when you are so, then, seeking the Lord in that fashion, you shall not be long before you find him.

Lastly, *when are we to seek him?* The text says “*now*.” I forget what day of the month this is. It does not matter. You will never forget the day of the month in which you seek the Lord and find him. Who among us ever forgot his natural birthday? Yet you are more likely to remember the day in which you begin to live unto God. A friend writes to me, and says, “Dear sir, my birthday was on such a day *and* such another day.” For the minute I thought, “Dear man! Has he been born twice?” Then I guessed his meaning. Is not the second birthday much the better of the two? Born to sorrow the first time: born to bliss the second time. Born in sin the first time: born in Christ the second time. Born in depraved nature at first: born in the image of Christ Jesus at last. Oh, how happy the men who have that better birthday! May it come to you at this good hour! There is never a better time in which to seek the Saviour than just now. Stay not for anything. “I must get better,” cries one. Must you? Is that what you do when you seek a surgeon? Do you say, “I must get a little better before I go”? You will never go at all if you wait to be better, for when you feel better, you will say, “I need not go now.” Is not that the style? No time is like time present.

There is an old saying that “Half a loaf is better than no bread”; but that saying is not true spiritually. A man who has half a loaf of his own never seeks the bread which came down from heaven. The man who has no bread at all is in a better case, for he is more likely to come to the banquet of divine grace. Come, ye starving ones, and eat of the bread of heaven. Believe and live. Faith brings God to you, and you to God; therefore believe and seek; seek and believe.

The Lord send all of you home with my text ringing in your ears, “Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God.”

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Chronicles xxi.
14—30; xxii. 1—16.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—607, 606.